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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000717

SIPDIS

CAIRO FOR MAXSTADT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SNAPSHOT OF NORTHERN GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reason: 1.5(d).

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: As with the Presidential contest, most Northern gubernatorial elections will be fought between the two major parties in Nigeria, the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigerians Peoples Party (ANPP). Overall, ANPP candidates are expected to benefit from the popularity of General Muhammadu Buhari in the region. While some incumbent governors (particularly Benue and Plateau) have been accused of incompetence, others are facing opposition from the local elite and power-brokers. In some states (Borno, Jigawa and Kaduna), intra-party squabbles arising from rancorous gubernatorial primaries have generated deep divisions within parties that will adversely affect candidates at the polls. Some places the incumbent will likely win because the opposition parties are weak and disorganized. A few governors (Katsina and Sokoto) are simply popular at the grassroots and would be difficult to defeat. In the end, we expect the majority of incumbents to return. This is a brief rundown of a few of the key races in the North. END SUMMARY.

ADAMAWA

2. (C) Vice President Atiku Abubakar is Adamawa's kingpin, and he is very close to the Lamido (traditional ruler). But his coattails may not be as long as is commonly assumed. The VP's popularity in some areas of this state is low. Incumbent governor Boni Haruna is not well liked and is running against a popular ANPP Candidate, Adamu Moddibo. Bala Takaya, a political science professor and established politician, is flying the AD flag. Takaya is popular with Christians and intellectuals. Many believe he won the election in 1999 but was wrongfully denied victory by vote tampering. Takaya comes from the same senatorial district as the governor; thus, they will split that area, which will benefit Modibbo (the only Muslim among the three in a state that is probably more than half Muslim). This should be a close race. An easy victory by Haruna would quickly precipitate cries of electoral fraud and violence.

BAUCHI

3. (SBU) Incumbent governor Adamu Mu'azu (PDP) has been an able administrator; he also is popular throughout the state. However, this race will not be a push-over. The ANPP had a strong presence in the State and some observers believe the party has an edge over the PDP. Buhari's coat tails will help the ANPP. However, Mu'azu's incumbency advantage and the PDP's determination to win suggest the governor will return.

BENUE

4. (C) Benue is the home of the Tiv, the largest ethnic group in the Middle Belt. Governor George Akume (PDP) has many problems with which to contend. Akume's inability to bring many development projects to his state has fueled accusations of incompetence. His kinsmen have questioned his relationship with President Obasanjo, whom they blame for the October 2001 Zaki-Biam massacre. Akume faces an enemy in his former mentor, the notoriously corrupt former PDP Chairman Chief Barnabas Gemade, who supported Akume financially in 1999. Gemade and Akume parted ways when Akume

supported Obasanjo at this year's PDP convention. In spite of these problems, Akume might win if he gets the support of the Idoma. The Idoma are the second largest ethnic group in the State and control one of three senatorial zones. PDP National Chairman Audu Ogbeh is Idoma, and observers expect Idomas to vote PDP. If Akume can win the Idoma bloc vote, he will have the inside track on his two major opponents, Paul Unongo (ANPP) and Mike Mku (UNPP); both of Akume's opponents are Tiv, and they will likely split the Tiv vote.

BORNO

15. (C) Incumbent governor Mala Kachalla is running on the AD ticket after losing the ANPP primary to Senator Ali Sheriff, his former financier. Sheriff has invested a great deal of time, energy and resources in building a political machine in the State and should win a close race. Kachalla still has the support of the political elite, but is disliked by civil servants in the state. PDP Candidate Kashim Ibrahim Imam, a well-regarded PDP operative, is likely to come in third; Borno is not a must-win state for the ruling party.

KADUNA

16. (C) Kaduna is the historic political center of the North. Many influential Northern politicians, businessmen, military and civil servants have residences in Kaduna city. Today, Kaduna state is almost evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. The current contest is between incumbent governor Ahmed Mohammed Makarfi (PDP) and his former Finance Commissioner, Suleiman Hunkuyi (ANPP). It will be close. The ANPP is very strong in the State, and Buhari's coattails are long. Makarfi's performance has been good and efforts to quell ethnic unrest in the state may help him retain his job. He may be the choice of mostly-Christian Southern Kaduna, where his creation of first-class chieftancies for local traditional rulers gained him support there but temporarily put him at odds with the influential Zaria Emirate. Makarfi's move to reconcile with his former adversary, Shehu Idris, the Emir of Zazzau (Zaria), and other senior PDP figures has greatly enhanced his chances of winning. However, Makarfi will have to contend with the strong opposition to Obasanjo in the northern Kaduna, Makarfi's home turf.

KANO

17. (C) With over four million registered voters, Kano is the most populous state in the region, and its capital city is the commercial center of the North. In 1999, PDP won the governorship race and most of the Assembly seats. A firm Obasanjo ally, Governor Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso has had problems with most of the political heavyweights in the state, including Speaker of the House Ghali Na'abba (who just lost his reelection bid in part due to Kwankwaso's opposition). Minister of Labor Musa Gwadabe and former Governor Abubakar Rimi also dislike Kwankwaso. Many locals are angry with the governor for not backing Rimi's quixotic bid for the PDP Presidential nomination. Obasanjo's popularity in Kano is very low because of failures to address social and economic problems; many industries have closed and thousands of workers have been laid-off. Both the city and the state benefited during the years of Abacha's rule, as the deceased dictator called Kano home. This anti-Obasanjo sentiment will hurt the Governor in Kano city.

18. (C) Kwankwaso is stronger in the rural areas, but his support for Obasanjo will cost him some votes there as well. Finally, although the steam is slowly escaping from the political Sharia boiler, its advocates retain their influence and continue to smolder over Kwankwaso's lukewarm endorsement of their movement. These factors, coupled with Buhari's coattails working for the ANPP mean that the incumbent would lose a fair race, even though the ANPP was long bitterly divided over its gubernatorial candidate. The

deciding factor is whether the race indeed will be fair. It probably will not be. To rebuild the PDP in the North after the election, Obasanjo and the PDP will have to demonstrate that they can return favors to their strong supporters (like Kwankwaso).

KATSINA

19. (C) Katsina is the home of General Buhari. He will push hard to make sure his party wins. Governor Umaru Yar'Adua (PDP) is respected and has performed well. However, Obasanjo and the PDP are unpopular (notwithstanding INEC vote counts from the April 12 elections that might suggest otherwise), and Buhari (son of the soil) is the overwhelming choice. Were the Presidential race not part of election day, the well-regarded Yar'Adua would probably be able to overcome the PDP's Obasanjo handicap easily. Even with the Buhari factor working against him, he has the GON and the national PDP pulling levers for him. He should pull off a squeaker over the ANPP's Nura Khalil.

KWARA

10. (C) A week ago, we would not have wanted to call this race; it was just too close. Both principal candidates had strong negatives, lots of money and hundreds of thugs. But with the PDP's April 12 performance in the state, an ANPP victory seems less likely now unless the AD candidate should (improbably) withdraw in favor of Governor Mohammed Lawal or Lawal should (and this is more likely) resort to widespread intimidation of voters in Kwara Central, the power base of his enemy, wealthy banker and former Presidential aspirant Dr. Olusola Saraki. Saraki's son is running for Governor, and his daughter recently claimed the Senate seat for Kwara Central.

PLATEAU

11. (C) Incumbent governor Joshua Dariye (PDP) is embattled. He has performed poorly and is a divisive political figure in a divided state. He has poured salt into Plateau's ethnic and religious wounds instead of salving them. Dariye faces strong opposition from every direction. Civil servants who have not been paid salaries for months have vowed to resist his comeback bid and are supporting the AD's Damishi Sango, former Minister of Sports. Sango is supported by Solomon Lar. Lar, a corrupt former PDP Chairman, is perhaps the most influential politician in the state. Plateau, particularly Langtang, is the home of many retired generals who are publicly active. They support the ANPP Candidate, General Jang.

SOKOTO

12. (C) Sokoto is the spiritual capital of the Northern Muslim community; it is the seat of the famous Sokoto Caliphate. By all accounts, Sokoto will be retained by the ANPP. Governor Attahiru Bafarawa may be almost incoherent when he speaks the English language, but he is politically comfortable and his opponent is weak. Bafarawa is widely seen as an "IBB Boy" in a state where the former military ruler remains popular. During the introduction of Shari'a, the Governor maintained a cordial relationship with the minority Christian community. Bafarawa was the first northern governor that openly criticized the Obasanjo Administration for discriminating against the North. Obasanjo's opponents in the North applauded this speech and Bafarawa instantly became a northern hero.
JETER